

LANIOTURDUS

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CONTENTS

NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

A branch of
the Namibia Scientific Society
and
the Southern African Ornithological Society

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

LANIOTURDUS publishes articles and other material of broad birding interest to the membership of the Namibia Bird Club. Contributors should examine recent issues of *LANIOTURDUS* for guidance on suitability and presentation of material. Manuscripts in German or English, should be typed in double-spacing on A4 paper. Sketches, maps and figures should be submitted on quality white paper with black ink. High contrast black-and-white or colour photographs may be submitted to illustrate articles. The editor is allowed wide latitude in his choice of material, thus any views and opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club. All material in *LANIOTURDUS* is copyright, and permission to reproduce any items must be negotiated with the Editor.

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A single copy of the volume-issue in which your article appeared will be sent to the senior author. Additional reprints may be purchased at cost from the Secretary, Namibia Bird Club, P.O. Box 67, Windhoek, Namibia.

All contributions (including books for review) to *LANIOTURDUS* should be addressed to the Editor, *LANIOTURDUS*, Namibia Bird Club, P.O. Box 67, Windhoek, Namibia.

EDITORIAL	.... 2
GALLAND, B. "Grusswort"	.... 3
ARTICLES, REPORTS, NEWS AND REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION:	
BECKER, P. Blutschnabelweber (<i>Quelea quelea</i>) brütet im Zuckerrohr (<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>).	.... 4
FRIEDE, G. & G. FRIEDE. Birds of the Swakop river lagoon - (Follow-up report 1992/1993)	.... 7
SIMMONS, R. Namibia's third national wetland bird survey, July 1992.	.... 9
VAN DE REEP, J. & S. When in doubt, check again!!	.... 12
SCHOPPE, R. Die Ernährung der Eulen Namibias: eine übersicht.	.... 13
GERSTLE, K. & P. From rags to riches.	.... 31
SCHOLZ, C. Notes on captive Orange River Francolins.	.... 35
WALTER, A. Unusual feeding behaviour of terns.	.... 36
BROOKE, R. A five-toed European Nightjar.	.... 37
WALTER, A. Kittlitz's Plovers in town.	.... 37
WALTER, A. Some observations of humorous nature.	.... 38
ROBITZSCH, G. Beobachtungen mit Witwen- und Melba-Finken im Karibiber Garten 1980 bis 1983.	.... 38
ROBITZSCH, G. Vergeblicher Nestbau eines verliebten Cabanis Webers.	.... 39
BROWN, C.J. Birds of the upper Huab River catchment, Cunene province.	.... 40
BAUER, W. Vogelbeobachtungen im Norden.	.... 47
KOMEN, J. & E. MALULEKE. Bio-acoustic research at the State Museum of Namibia.	.... 48
VAN DE REEP, J. & S. Cocky Bustard.	.... 50
BRIDGEFORD, P.A. & M. South African Cliff Swallows in Namibia.	.... 53
VAN DE REEP, S. ? Thorn bird ?	.... 57
BECKER, P. & O.G. AMIR. Effects on non-target birds through spraying operations on quelea roost and colonies in Somalia (With a list of birds predatory on Red-billed Quelea and a list of palaeartic bird species observed in Somalia).	.... 58
VAN DE REEP, J. & S. Flashing jewels in combat.	.... 63
BRIDGEFORD, P.A. & M. More birds of the Naukluft Mountains.	.... 64
SIMMONS, R. The Namibian nest record scheme: history, contributors and competitors.	.... 66

DISCUSSION

The Naukluft Mountains cover a large area and all human habitations are on the outskirts of the mountains. There are few roads on the plateau and they are in a poor condition so that travel on the plateau is limited. These facts we think, are the reason why Orange River and Hartlaub's Francolin are so seldom recorded.

However, we are of the opinion that Grey Hornbills have moved into the area and are now established. It is unlikely that no one recorded these highly visible birds with their very audible and distinctive call before now.

CONCLUSION

As more birds are recorded the number of species will increase and status and abundance categories will change.

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**THE NAMIBIAN NEST RECORD SCHEME:
HISTORY, CONTRIBUTORS AND COMPETITORS**

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SUMMARY

This first annual report on the Namibian nest record scheme provides details of the top contributors since inception, and the top contributors, number of cards and species for 1991/1992. Over 5 000 cards have been received, and 66% were provided by just 14 contributors. The highest total was achieved by Rolf Jensen (over 700 cards) and the top contributor for 1991/92 was Dave Noble with 70 cards. A general downward trend in the number of contributors and the number of cards has been observed in recent years; drought-affected breeding is probably the reason. However, the number of cards received for 1991/92 increased to 362 from 29 observers following the announcement of a competition for the most cards received each year. This year's total would have been even higher but for some nest-finders not submitting their records. With the establishment of this form of feedback we hope to encourage more observers and timeous submission of records.

INTRODUCTION

Namibian nest records started as long ago as 1866 when CJ Anderson, collecting and travelling in Namibia, recorded four White-backed Mousebird nests. His tally of 30 cards marked the beginning of nest recording, which began in earnest in 1960. In that year a mere two contributors filed 6 cards, a total which has now grown to an impressive 5 000 records, and up to 32 contributors per year. While these cards were summarised in 1988 by former ministry of wildlife ornithologist Chris Brown, no regular feedback has been forthcoming and this is reflected in a gradually diminishing number of contributors in recent years (see Figure 1). Without feedback many such schemes languish in filing cabinets, unused and forgotten, hence of little use to anyone. However, the information they hold is vital for monitoring Namibia's avifauna, for recording new breeding species and is of great use for research projects which require baseline data on endemics or single-species studies.

This first report is an attempt to provide up-to-date information on new cards received per year, to stimulate participants to record (and submit! - see below) everything they come across and to provide some guidelines as to what data we lack in such a scheme. For example Brown (1988) found in his summary that of 510 potentially breeding species, 289 had at least one nest record card. While that may seem a healthy figure, a look at the reverse side of the coin means that 221 SPECIES HAVE NO CARDS AT ALL. These are not necessarily rare species either: No records exist for any nightjars, any kingfishers, virtually nothing exists on *Parus* tits, House Sparrows are represented by one record, Pygmy Falcons have just 3 cards, and Augur Buzzards 4 records. Larger wetland birds are very poorly represented also. Here I also provide a historical perspective on the scheme and chart those individuals, past and present, who have added most to its success over the years.

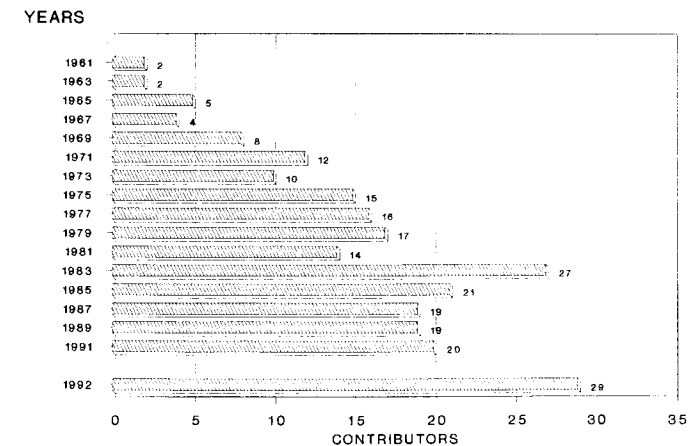


Figure 1. The average number of contributors for two year periods from 1960 to 1991. The year 1991/92 is given separately since it represents one breeding year not one calendar year. The trend is for a decreasing number of contributors following a peak in 1982 + 1983. The average number of contributors from 1960 to 1991 was 12.

AIMS

The purpose of the nest record scheme is primarily to ascertain (i) breeding seasons and (ii) clutch sizes. Further data which is usually limited to the most complete cards can be had on the success or failure of the nest. Only 20 species have more than 50 records and thus may have data on success rates.

While Namibia's nest records are in a fairly healthy state, records trickle in fairly slowly at present (see Historical perspective below). In order to improve both the number of contributions and the quality (completeness) of the contribution, the ornithology section of the ministry decided to institute a newsletter to allow feedback to diligent nest recorders who rarely hear anything back for their labours.

The present report is intended to provide a yearly summary of all nest records received during the main breeding season (September- May). Secondly, in conjunction with the Namibian Bird Club, we will award a prize to the amateur bird-observer submitting the most cards. All cards must be submitted by August 30 to be included herein.

The report, therefore, will detail:

- (i) people contributing the most number of cards
- (ii) people contributing the most complete* cards
- (iii) people contributing the most new species, and
- (iv) the best represented species for each year.

* A complete card is one in which the breeding attempt is followed through from eggs or newly hatched young to fledging or failure.

The hope is that this will generate a competitive edge between contributors. Some schemes abroad regularly attract 200 cards from their top contributors - a very high total indeed achieved only once before in Namibia (below).

GUIDELINES

Lest you think that such a scheme will encourage reckless disturbance of nests, we encourage contributors to respect the birds they are recording. Thus, ideally, nests of small species can be checked every 3 - 7 days, while larger species can be checked every 7 - 10 days. For most species, however, **just three well-timed visits will be sufficient to record everything:** (i) when the parents are incubating full time, clutch is normally complete and this is the best time to record full clutch size; (ii) from Robert's birds of southern Africa (Maclean 1985) one can predict the hatch date and revisit then for hatchlings; (iii) from the last visit and using nestling period data in Robert's, one can predict first flight date and visit the nest 2 - 3 days earlier. Visits at this time should be brief and nestlings not handled; if they are they are likely to "explode" the nest and jump or fly before they are ready.

If you find the nest of a known Red Data species please take extra special care to avoid undue harassment. If you suspect that nests you are monitoring, especially of rarer species, are being robbed of eggs or chicks, as happened in a Black Eagle study in Zimbabwe, please notify the nearest conservation offices immediately and note details of car numbers and descriptions.

NEST PREDATION

It is well known among professional and keen amateur ornithologists that nest predation rates in the tropics are very much higher than in temperate zones. Reasons are clearly related to the high density of predators constantly on the prowl for an easy meal. For ground-nesting species this is a particular problem and walking past the nest in a wide arc and viewing it from several metres will help diminish predation. Simply stopping in front of the nest and back tracking is not a deterrent. While it is a myth that handling eggs or young will invariably cause desertion (birds have a very poor sense of smell and cannot pick up human scent), it is true that a bird seeing a predator at its nest, especially shortly after it has started will increase the chances of early desertion. Please avoid visits at this time; watch from a distance.

We encourage you to submit any hair-raising stories of difficult nests, and especially interesting or unusual observations of nesting attempts or rare species; these can all be included in the newsletter. Please send them to the Ornithology section.

RESULTS

Most species records and interesting findings: 1991-1992

The Namibian nest recording scheme for May 1991 to May 1992 amassed a total of 362 cards, of which 121 cards (33%) were complete records. The cards recorded 81 different species (Table 1). This is a reversal of a downward trend in recent years for fewer cards (Figure 2): the 362 cards represents the fourth highest yearly total since 1960. The number of contributors also

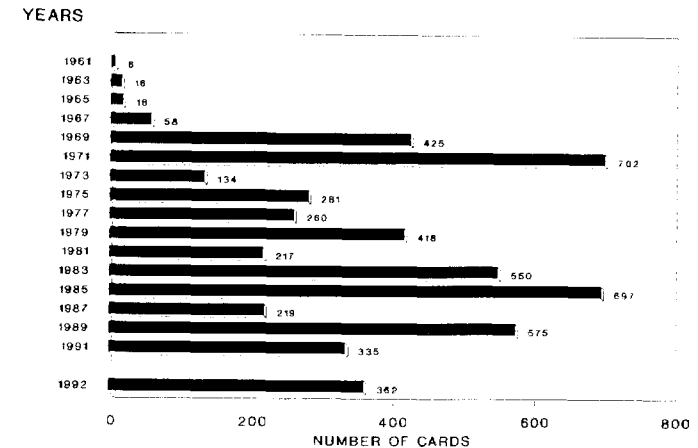


Figure 2. The number of Namibian nest records received per year since 1960. Each bar represents the total for two years starting with 1960 + 1961. The year 1991/92 is given separately since it represents one breeding year, not a calendar year. The trend is for a decreasing number of cards following peaks in 1970 + 1971 and 1984 + 1985. The average number of cards per year from 1960 to 1992 was 171.

Table 1: New nest records received for May 1991 - May 1992

SPECIES	No. CARDS	NOTES*
Ostrich	6	2,9,10, 12, 14, and 14 young
Pelican	2	202 nests and 87 nests, Hardap
Whitebreasted Cormorant	1	92 nests, Hardap
Darter	1	2e
Lappet-faced Vulture	3	1y,1y,1y,
Martial Eagle	1	1y
Fish Eagle	1	1e+1y
Black Eagle	1	-
Wahlberg's Eagle	3	1y,1y,1y,
Greater Kestrel	1	4e
Rock Kestrel	1	-
Lanner Falcon	1	2y
Augur Buzzard	2	2e
Gabar Goshawk	5	-
Little Banded Goshawk	1	-
Orange River Francolin	1	4y
Guineafowl	1	1F
Redknobbed Coot	3	1y,2y,3y
Blue Crane	3	1y and 2y
Kori Bustard	1	2y
Ruppell's Korhaan	2	1y,2y
Crowned Plover	5	3y, 3e,3e,2e,1e
Blacksmith Plover	1	2e
Whitefronted Plover	21	1y(x18), 2y(x3)
Chestnutbanded Plover	2	1y,2y
Kitlitz's Plover	1	2y
Avocet	1	1y
Double-banded Courser	2	1e, 1F
Damara Tern	151	One nest started mid March at Sandwich H. All 1e, bar 4 nests with 2e at Hottentot Bay
Laughing Dove	4	1y,2y,2y,2y
Rock Pigeon	4	2e,2e,2y
Spotted Eagle Owl	2	1y, 1F on Sociable Weaver nest at Etosha Wood Owl
	1	2y
White faced Owl	2	2e,2y in sociable weaver nest
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	1	2y
Bradfield's Hornbill	1*	2y at Waterberg
Redbilled Hornbill	1	-
Yellowbilled Hornbill	1	Adult wing hanging from sealed entrance predator possibly Gymnogene

Grey Hornbill	1	2y
Barbet	3	2y,3y,1F
Sabota Lark	1	2y
Greater Striped Swallow	1	1e
Rock Martin	4	3y,2y,1y,1y
Fork-tailed Drongo	3	2y,3y
Black Crow	1	2y
Red-eyed Bulbul	1	2y
Black-eyed Bulbul	1	-
Groundscraper Thrush	1	2y
Short-toed Rockthrush	1	4y
Mountain Chat	2	2F
Familiar Chat	4	1y,1y,3y, 1F
Rockrunner	3	3e,3y,1F
Titbabbler	1	2e
Barred Warbler	1	3e(F)
Black-chested Prinia	4	-
Rattling Cisticola	1	2y
Long-billed Crombec	2	2F
Marico Flycatcher	2	3y,2y
Paradise Flycatcher	1	2y
Crimsonbreasted Shrike	3	3e,1 black cuckoo, 1F
Swamp Boubou	1	1y
Fiscal Shrike	1	3y
Brubru Shrike	1	-
Puffbacked Shrike	1	-
White-tailed Shrike	2	1y,1y
Pirit Batis	3	2 with Klaas Cuckoo chicks, 1F
Three-streaked Chagra	2	2F
White-browed Sparrow weaver	2	2e,2y
Brown-throated Weaver	1	-
Thick billed Weaver	1	-
Masked Weaver	27	1F, 1 with Cuckoo chick
Chestnut Weaver	7	3y,3y,3y,1y, colony started by males in Jan '92 but failed to attract females
Red Bishop	3	1e,3y,3y
Cape Sparrow	1	2y
Grey headed Sparrow	2	2y,1F, one nest used for 12 yr
Great Sparrow	1	-
Redheaded Finch	1	1F
Black-cheeked Waxbill	4	1e
Violet-eared Waxbill	2	3e, 1F
Golden Breasted Bunting	2	2e,2y both at Hobatere
Rock Bunting	2	2y, 1F

TOTALS: 81 SPECIES 362 CARDS

* e = eggs; y = young; F = Failed

jumped to 29 (Table 2), the second highest since the scheme began, following a general downward trend in recent years (Figure 2).

To give some idea of the trends in cards submitted over the last 22 years I have graphed the total for each 2-year period (Figure 1). Peaks were obvious in 1970 + 1971 and 1984 + 1985, coincident it seems with new ornithologists joining the ministry! In 1970 Rolf Jensen was new and enthusiastic, while in 1984 Chris Brown had just arrived. It appears therefore that a call for cards and mention of a competition for the most number of nest record cards, sent out in late 1991, had the desired effect. The average number of cards for the period from 1960 to 1992 is 171 per year.

Contributions for 1991/1992

Highlights for the breeding period September 1991 to May 1992 were an impressive number of (151) nests found for the rare Damara Tern (Table 1). This elusive species nests almost exclusively in Namibian deserts and conservation officials have a special attachment to this diminutive species.

Surveys up and down the coast brought to light some interesting findings: first, Damara Terns usually lay one egg and in less than 1% of all nests have two eggs ever been found. However, Dave de Villiers checking a colony on the Hottentot Bay salt pan near Luderitz, turned up 12 nests, four (33%) of which had two eggs each. This is a very unusual finding and worthy of further study (De Villiers & Simmons 1992). Second, the survey, organised by yours truly, found contrary to expectation that DTs nest throughout the northern desert as far as the Cunene River mouth; results are presented elsewhere (Simmons in press). Special mention must be given to Jan Friede, a conservation ranger based in the Skeleton Coast Park who took it upon himself to beat the magic 100 cards for Damara Terns. The good news is that he did so with an enormous total of about 130 cards (with a little help from his brother Ole). The bad news is that he did not submit all of his cards before the (revised) November 30 deadline, and thus missed beating the highest total for the year. This is a recurrent theme unfortunately, as at least three nest finders fell into this category. If this newsletter helps us keep up to date with timeous submissions, then it will have achieved one of its purposes.

Two sets of visiting ornithologists came to Namibia in 1991-92. The first was Dave Noble from Cambridge University who is in Namibia to look at the brood parasites (cuckoos etc) and their host species (weavers etc). This involved much foot slogging in the Wasserberg, Daan Viljoen and other areas around Windhoek. Using the search-every-damn-tree method, Dave found an impressive total of 70 nests of 24 different species including some young cuckoos. His was the highest individual total for this year. He will be back next year, so if you find suspected cuckoo eggs please let him know (via this ministry). This sort of contribution is vital for the study of Namibian avifauna and we are more than grateful to Dave for putting us all in the shade.

Second, husband and wife team Mark Stanback and Nancy Popkin from Berkley University (California), in collaboration with John Mendelssohn, continued some exciting research on Hornbills in the Daan Viljoen Reserve. Checking just under 100 nest boxes almost daily for 2 months, they found 35 active nests of the four species (Red, Yellow, Grey and Monteiro's) and found high success in early nests but poor success in late nests. Some birds took to the new nest boxes within days of them being erected, clearly showing that nest sites are limited for these hole nesters. However, they too have yet to submit their nest records and I hope this shames them into doing so!

Further west, Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford reported a White faced Owl nest from the Namib Naukluft Park which was found in a hole in the side of a Sociable Weaver nest. Another nest, this time of a Grey headed Sparrow was reported by Peter to have been in use for 12 years. For Peter too I know there are a few outstanding Lappet-faced Vulture records not yet submitted; these include the first ever record for two young vultures reared in a nest. We await the write-up on that one with great interest.

Wynand du Plessis, a researcher at Etosha, reported a particularly confiding (not to mention ingenious) Spotted Eagle Owl with a nest on top of a Sociable Weaver's nest near Leeubron.

Top nest finders

The highest total for this year was Dave Noble's 70 cards, 66 of which were "complete" records (Table 2). A suitable prize is to be presented to Dave later in the year. Close on his heels was Jan Friede who submitted 68 cards - all Damara Terns. Conservation officials, now sadly working in other fields, are husband and wife team Sean Rohm and Robyn Norris-Jones, who also chased terns and plovers in the desert. They submitted 52 cards covering 6 species. Fourth with 25 cards and 20 species was long-time birder/naturalist Steve Braine. Special mention must be given to Steve, now running a successful safari-lodge business at Hobatere: he has been submitting cards for an astonishing 24 years. His totals and other long-term contributors in the "100 club" are given below.

Yet another desert-living couple Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford came a close fifth and submitted a high proportion of complete cards (57%) for 18 species. Either there's a lot more going on in the desert than us city-bums realise, or people in the desert have little else to do but chase breeding birds and fill in nest record cards! It calls for a trip to the desert.

Summary and conclusion for 1991/92

In all, 29 people submitted 362 nest record cards for the 91/92 breeding period (Tables 1 and 2). The total would have been at least 100 cards higher had all cards been submitted. I note with disappointment that very few were received from Namibian Bird Club members and none were received from the Bird Department of the State Museum.

Table 2: Contributors for May 1991 - May 1992

Contributors	Total cards	complete cards
1. Dave Noble	70	66
2. Jan and Ole Friede	68	0
3. Sean Rohm/Robyn Norris-Jones	52	15
4. Steve Braine	25	11
5. Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford	23	11
6. Peter Tarr	18	10
7. Dave de Villiers	12	0
8. Rob Simmons	11	1
9. Hu and Conny Berry	10	0
10. Chris Brown	9	1
11. Rod and Sigi Braby	8	0
12. J. Erasmus	7	0
13. Roy Miller	7	7
14. Jock Orford	7	2
15. Eddie Coleman	5	5
16. L. Stafford	5	0
17. Wilfred Versfeld	5	1
18. D. Boois	4	0
19. Mark Berry	3	0
20. Linda Baker	3	0
21. I.A. van den Heever	2	0
22. J.A. Delpont	1	0
23. P. & K. Gerstler	1	0
24. B. Kapunee	1	0
25. Patrick Lane	1	1
26. A. Meyer	1	1
27. M. Paxton	1	1
28. Wynand du Plessis	1	1
29. Dave Ward	1	0
Total	362 cards	134 complete

The year 1991/92 showed a marked improvement in reporting rate and number of contributors, reversing a downward trend in contributions (Figures 1 and 2). I thank every contributor for this year for their time and effort put into (the often tedious) filling in nest records. More cards and nest sheets can be ordered from the ornithology section.

Table 3: The top 14 contributors (with more than 100 cards each) in the Namibian nest record scheme (1960 - 1992)

CONTRIBUTOR	TOTAL CARDS	MOST CARDS/YEAR
1. R. Jensen	748	208
2. C. Clinning	508	147
3. S. Braine	478	126
4. C. Hines	277	152
5. P. Bridgeford	244	72
6. P. Tarr	184	42
7. M. Paxton	176	35
8. G. Patten	174	69
9. H. Berry	166	87
10. T. Archibald	164	59
11. R. Loutit	158	34
12. W. Niethammer	148	40
13. L. Baker	111	33
14. J. Cooper	110	59
TOTAL	3 646 cards	

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Top contributors

Over the 32 years that the scheme has been running some impressive totals have been built up by dedicated bird observers. However, the general trend has been one of peaks and troughs following new injections of enthusiasm. This is a not unfamiliar phenomenon in such long term monitoring schemes (Underhill 1991) and the cause is almost always the same: either poor or no feedback decreases the enthusiasm of even the most ardent supporters.

So who were the best contributors over the last few years? The scheme started in 1866 with cards from the Swedish explorer-naturalist CJ Anderson. Several species he collected were named after him. The scheme really took off with Rolf Jensen (nature conservation's first full-time ornithologist) in the early 1970s. He amassed a huge total of 748 cards from over 50 species in 11 years and is the top contributor to the scheme (Table 3). In just one year he topped the magic figure of 200 cards with 208 cards in 1969. No other contributor has done so, before or since. Other outstanding contributions have come from Charles Clinning, also an ornithologist with nature conservation, with 508 cards, and ex-conservator Steve Braine with 478 cards. Recent high totals have come from past wetlands biologist Chris Hines who in 1988 collected 152 cards of mainly

wetland species. His total stands at 277 cards. These top four contributors have amassed 2 011 cards between them (Table 3), 37% of the total.

Other notable contributors, with over 100 cards each, are given in Table 3. In total, these 14 contributors have provided almost two-thirds (3 646) of the total 5 484 cards received up to 1992.

Thirty-nine contributors have deposited between 10 and 100 cards to the scheme, and the top contributors in this category are again nature conservation staff. Chris Brown (92 cards) heads the table with R. Noller (90 cards) second, followed by C.J. Stutterheim (84), Ben Riekert (83) and fifth J.A. Meyer with 77 cards. In total, contributors in this category have provided 1 405 cards. Contributors with less than 10 cards number 117 and they have provided 418 cards.

Thus we can see a major skew in the type of contribution: a few very keen ornithologists (Table 3) have provided the majority of the cards and the majority of contributors provide less than 10% of all records. Steve Braine, as already mentioned, is the longest serving contributor, starting way back in 1965, with virtually no breaks.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the drought years, the breeding year 1991/1992 showed a renewed interest in nest recording, turning around a steady decline in numbers of cards and contributors. I hope this summary encourages contributors such as yourselves by giving yearly feedback on cards and species and generating a competitive edge among the top contributors. Please, once you have done the hard graft to find nests and monitor them, submit your cards before the August 1993 deadline.

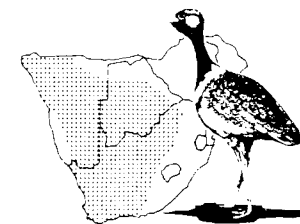
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A word of thanks to Rosa Isaacs and Robin Heber-Percy who did the hard graft to collate all the cards by year, author and species and of course to the contributors themselves. Please print your address and a telephone number on at least one card so that any problems arising can be checked immediately.

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BIRD HABITAT PHOTOS WANTED FOR THE ATLAS OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN BIRDS



The *Atlas of Southern African Birds* is to be published in 1995 and will include a selection of colour photographs illustrating the major habitats used by birds in the sub-region. Photographers, both amateurs and professionals, are invited to submit material for consideration. Photos should be in the form of colour slides. Colour prints or negatives are not acceptable, nor are photos that already have been published elsewhere. The name of the photographer must appear on each slide submitted. Please also provide details of the locality where the photo was taken and do not forget to include your address. Receipt of material will be acknowledged and photos not selected will be returned promptly. No remuneration is envisioned for accepted material but each published photo will be fully acknowledged and will have a byline identifying the photographer. Listed below are the relevant habitats for which illustrations are required.

Pelagic - pelagic seabirds at trawler.

Coastal - sandy and/or rocky coastline.

River - large river showing strip of riverine vegetation along banks contrasting with surrounding habitat, e.g. Orange or Zambezi Rivers (including aerial photos).

Pan - pan showing open water and exposed shore.

Vlei - marshy wetland showing emergent and/or floating vegetation.

Dam - large man-made dam, e.g. along Orange, Vaal, Zambezi, etc. (including aerial photos).

• *Namib* - sand dunes and/or gravel plains.

• *Namibian escarpment* - e.g. Khomas Hochland, Daan Viljoen Nature Reserve, Erongos, Kaokoland, Naukluft, etc.

• *Succulent karoo* - e.g. Namaqualand, Knersvlakte, Ceres/Tanqua karoo, etc.

Little karoo - showing hilly karoo/woodland mix.

• *Nama karoo* - e.g. Bushmanland, eastern Cape karoo, etc., plus additional photos of this habitat with Acacia watercourse through it.

Grassy karoo - e.g. southern Orange Free State and area bounded by Hopetown, Victoria West, Cradock and Burgersdorp in Cape Province.

Fynbos - mountainous and/or lowland.

Grassland - sweet, sour and mixed grasslands, i.e. tall, sparse grassland in drier areas, e.g. western Transvaal and short, dense grassland in high rainfall areas, e.g. associated with Drakensberg and eastern Transvaal highveld.

Lesotho - montane grassland/heath/scrub on plateau highlands.